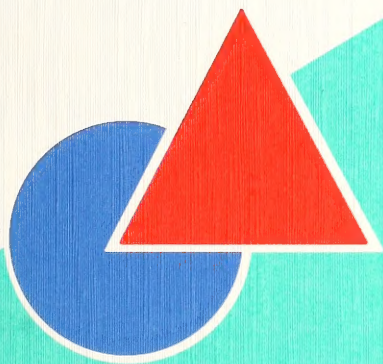


**SPIRITAN
LIFE**



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1997**

**THE MISSIONARY
in the
PARISH**

Spiritan Life aims at being a forum for Ongoing Formation and Animation:

- *through the shared experiences of confreres*
- *through reflection on these experiences*
- *through the inspiration of our founders, our tradition and the demands of mission today.*

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INTRODUCTION

Mission in a Parish

This first number of the new "Spiritan Life" examines the question of mission in parishes. It was chosen because so many confreres are living out their missionary life in parishes; some of these parishes are coming into existence, others are expanding, yet others are fully developed. Questions are asked about our involvement in parish work. Is it our type of work? Is it in line with the Spiritan vocation? When we are in parishes, what distinguishes us from diocesan clergy?

But the more important question to be asked is **how** can we be Spiritans in a parish setting. In our life and undertakings, what are our characteristics, even if some of them are shared by others? The following articles describe how some of our confreres reply, simply and with great generosity, to the needs of those to whom they are sent.

In reading these testimonies, coming from such a variety of situations, one can detect certain inspirations, attitudes, and ways of going about things that we can say are "typically Spiritan". Sometimes it is outsiders who say it for us. The article of reflection tries to draw out these traits as they are found in our approach to mission in a parish.

Note. Starting from the next edition, the editorial team intends to add other sections to this review: a bibliography, comments on important events, a reflection on some current question on mission, and a "forum" where confreres can express their own ideas.

SPIRITAN LIFE

The new "Spiritan Life" could be called "The Acts of the Apostles" according to the Spiritans. The contributions are an attempt to share our missionary life and work with each other and so provide *a source of encouragement and on-going formation.*

Like the author of the Acts of the Apostles, we are convinced that the Spirit of Pentecost is at work in our mission, that He is the one who guides our steps through our generosity and despite our hesitations. In reading this Spiritan "Acts" we will be opening our hearts to one another, *discerning together what the Spirit asks of us today.*

We are seeking how to reply to our vocation. When God calls, it is for a particular mission, a particular task to be accomplished. "Spiritan Life", through its articles and reflection, will try to see **how we can reply to this call.** However modest our contribution might be, we are all called, with many others, *to take part in this vast plan that God has for the human race.* This is where "Spiritan Life" would like to play its part.

Concretely, "Spiritan Life" wants to be a means of on-going formation as well as an instrument of animation for the Congregation, sharing lived experiences along the lines of Itaici. It wants to help confreres live out their vocation as religious missionaries. Each edition will deal with a separate theme or a particular type of Spiritan experience.

The beginning, the Synod Fathers recognised that the Church as Family cannot reach her full potential as Church unless she is divided into communities small enough to foster close human relationships. The Assembly described the characteristics of such communities as follows: primarily they should be places engaged in evangelising themselves, so that subsequently they can bring the Good News to others; they should moreover be communities which pray and listen to God's Word, encourage the members themselves to take on responsibility, learn to live an ecclesial life, and reflect on different human problems in the light of the Gospel. Above all, these communities are to be committed to living Christ's love for everybody, a love which transcends the limits of natural solidarity of clans, tribes or other interest groups.

(Ecclesia in Africa, N° 89)

CONGO: SPIRITANS IN A PARISH

René Tabard

René Tabard is currently the Religious Superior of the Spiritans in Congo. Amongst his past activities, he taught theology in the Senior Seminary and Spiritan Scolasticate in Brazzaville and was parish priest of St. Kisito. Father René looks at several ways of being a missionary in a parish in the Congo context.

The Attitude of Some Young People

It is not unusual to find little enthusiasm amongst young scholastics for working within parochial structures. They feel that the administration of the sacraments would be so time-consuming that there would be little time or space left for a missionary to live out the essence of his vocation.

The District of Congo itself adopted this vision to a certain extent: "*Parish work has come to an end for Spiritans in the Congo. We must look for extra-parochial activities*". And a whole list of missionary engagements has been thought of: work with young delinquents, AIDS victims, prostitutes, prisoners.....in other words, a series of involvements where the young missionary can live to the full his pastoral care for the poorest of people.

So does this mean that parish work should be eliminated from the repertoire of a Spiritan? Are there not enough diocesan priests to look after the parishes?

A Clarification

At their meeting in Bangui at the beginning of 1995, the Principal Superiors of Central Africa and some members of the General Council, threw some light on these ideas. We can summarise the essentials of these exchanges:

- *There are many reasons why extra-parochial communities and apostolates are justified.* The local clergy are growing in number and are able to take over responsibility for the parishes. In the large cities of Africa, the number of people who are marginalised and living in deplorable conditions is on the increase all the time, yet they are not normally to be found amongst the priorities of the parishes.

- But on the other hand, it must be realised that *caring for these people outside of the parochial context is far from easy.* It calls for skills that basic formation does not provide. Working alone is very demanding; hopes are often dashed, relationships difficult. There is the problem of finance. This type of apostolate does not fit in easily with an ordered life. Consequently, there was a feeling amongst some of those present that *this sort of work is probably not the best for those who are beginning their ministry.* It is more realistic for them to start in a parochial setting that is compatible with the Spiritan vocation.

Can one go further than this? I propose to indicate **some missionary possibilities within parochial structures** in the context of central Africa. They will be based on my experience of being in charge of an urban parish in Brazzaville, St. Kisito. My visits as Principal Superior gave me the opportunity to enlarge on this experience.

Home Visiting

I asked one priest what for him would be at the heart of the Spiritan pastoral tradition. He answered, *"As far as possible, not much office work but a great deal of home-visiting. There has to be some receiving of people in the office, but nothing can replace **meeting them in their own homes.** We have divided the streets between the three members of the community; we visit each house, whether the people are Catholics or not, we visit the sick and the bed-ridden, have a chat with some people, perhaps give some advice on the building of a house...."*

When this is done, the people are no longer anonymous, they have a name and a face and they form ties with those responsible for running

the parish. And one surprising and encouraging effect is that the numbers at church on Sunday increase by a third each year.

The same is true of the country areas. For example, the people of North Congo, who are spread out over a huge area, like to tell me about the visit of a Father, sometimes after many years of not having seen anybody. Visiting people in their villages, even the most remote, creates Christian community and dynamism.

To be a missionary, it is not enough to leave one's country and culture behind and remain seated in an office, seeing the people through the windows of a car. Such a missionary has not gone very far on his journey to join the poor. We have literally to **"go out" to meet the people**, to be with them, to share their lives and their journeys, in short, to witness to the Gospel. You could call this *"the mission of pilgrimage"*. Is this not our way of living the journey of Christ, of incarnating ourselves?

In trying to live a mission suitable to our times, it would be sad if we lost *this practice of our predecessors*, even if it entails adapting it to modern means. The reactions of people can give us an idea of the pastoral approach we should adopt. We often hear them say, *"You came to our house, you drank some palm wine, you prayed with my daughter who was sick, we remember your words of comfort"*. The memory of such a visit can turn out to be a ray of Easter hope that continues to shine in their lives.

Basic Communities

From the end of the 60s, a Dutch Spiritan started to set up basic communities. This way of "being Church", taking different forms in the country and the towns, spread throughout the Congo, meeting with both acceptance and hesitation. Today, basic ecclesial communities are found almost everywhere in Africa.

The Apostolic Exhortation "Ecclesia in Africa", no 89, underlines their importance: *"Right from the beginning, the Synod Fathers recognised*

that the Church as Family cannot reach her full potential as Church unless she is divided into communities small enough to foster close human relationships". And the same number goes on to enumerate the characteristics of these communities: "...places engaged in evangelising themselves...communities which pray and listen to God's word, encourage the members themselves to take on responsibility, learn to live an ecclesial life, and reflect on different human problems in the light of the Gospel....committed to living Christ's love for everybody, a love which transcends the limits of the natural solidarity of clans, tribes or other interest groups".

The experience of basic ecclesial communities in Africa and other continents, and the recognition of their importance in constructing the Church as Family by the Synod on Africa leads to the conclusion that they are **a favoured way of being a living parish**. The Gospel radiates out from the centre and spreads into the different areas of life, touching the real questions and problems which people are facing and reaching those who are furthest away.

This style of being Church in no way diminishes **the role of the parish centre**: perhaps it even leads us to restore it. The Synod document, "Ecclesia in Africa" defines its essence: *"By its nature, the parish is the ordinary place where the faithful worship and live their Christian life...it is the place which manifests the communion of various groups and movements....Priests and lay people will see to it that parish life is harmonious, expressing the Church as Family..."*(no. 100).

By adopting this model of parish, one which is divided into different types of small communities, it may help to rid people of the fears and hesitations they have regarding the structure of parishes - the anonymity, Christian life reduced to Sunday practice or reception of the sacraments without any real involvement in the community, family or society. Through these small communities, the Christian can become the **messenger and agent of the strength contained in the Gospel**, which can transform people, their milieu and the society in which they live.

A Missionary Parish

Last year in Brazzaville there was an effort to make the Christians in the parishes realise their duty **to play their part in evangelization**. Each Christian was asked to visit four families who lived close to them in order to get to know them, revitalise perhaps a dormant faith and offer the possibility of catechesis for those who wished. It is impossible to measure the benefits of these meetings for individuals, but there was one visible sign that is worth noting: in nearly all the areas, around twenty children joined the catechumenate.

This experience is an example of **the possibilities** for evangelization that exist in parishes. To be a missionary in this context is to awaken Christians to their missionary obligations, to make the community itself missionary by multiplying the agents of evangelization. The parish community, because of the great diversity of its members, by origin, race and background, is in a position to respond to the various needs and expectations of the wider community.

This missionary spirit helps the community overcome the temptation to see itself as always on the receiving end ; it inspires it to look for new ways of evangelization, of services and ministries for the people that will witness to the Gospel. The parishes, and also the small communities, are excellent places to make a local reality of the idea of the Church as "*essentially missionary*" (Ad Gentes: no. 2). If this is so, then the Spiritan can also be "*essentially missionary*" when working in the same parishes.

Use the Opportunities that are Presented

So parishes can offer scope for a special kind of creativity. In Brazzaville, the parish community would number around 10,000 people; of those, about half have ties with the parish, and most of them would be young. The chances to be creative are there; all that is needed is to be open to initiatives, to push the various possibilities and to co-ordinate it for the good of all.

Here is an example of what I mean. One of the great problems in the Congo is *access to basic medical care*. In the present situation, many people, particularly the poor, have no way of getting medical help or buying medicines, which have become impossibly expensive with the devaluation of the currency. Recourse to prayer or certain pious practices is not an answer to the problem.

Faced with this suffering, the parish of St. Kisito created the "**centre de l'accueil des malades**". Basing it on the wisdom of the older people, we mainly use plants, which are very efficacious in many cases. And as health is seen in an holistic context in African tradition, where relationships with the family and natural forces are very much involved, we also make use of plants (tisanes), counselling and prayer, while not neglecting consultation with a nurse or doctor. Around fifty people are involved. More than 100,000 people have been treated at this centre. Many have been cured so its fame has spread far and wide. And now, under the control of the public services, these herbal medicines, which have been proved to be efficacious for particular sicknesses, are on sale on the open market.

This initiative has been running for five years. Without the parish, I doubt if such an undertaking, and many others like it, would have been possible. The fact that it is on parish grounds means that any fetishist practice or interpretation can be eliminated. The whole parish reaps a certain credit from the scheme, and remains an attractive centre, particularly for the young. Moreover, the initiative answers a simple need; the civil authorities, which find it difficult to cope with the situation, leave us a great freedom of action.

The Witness of Community

Without excluding non-parochial communities, the Spiritan District of the Congo has opted in general for *larger communities in a parish setting*. Despite the difficulty that this decision represents for certain individuals, or the restraints it imposes on other pastoral benefits, we have decided to persevere along this path.

The good that can flow from community life has been brought out in our recent chapters. Today, **the witness that it brings to mission and evangelization** is particularly stressed. Because of the increasing number of confreres who originate from the southern hemisphere, the witness of community living, whether large or small, is becoming all the more relevant in situations of racial and tribal conflict or of tensions between North and South. Can we detect, in the diversification of membership in missionary institutes today, a call to *witness to the possibility of people living together in harmony as brothers and sisters?*

The Episcopal conference of Congo certainly looks to missionaries and religious for that example: *"As religious, your role is very important...Many of you are living in communities made up of people of different languages and racial origins. There is nothing in the history of your countries that explains the efforts you make to live as brothers and sisters: it springs only from your faith. And we know that it is not always easy to live in the same house when people are very different and many things are working against it. We encourage you to continue to work out your differences in the name of your faith, to witness to what can appear to be impossible: loving each other despite the difference of language, race and customs. In this way, you are an example for the Congolese people of what is possible through faith in Jesus Christ, the centre of a real and deep unity for the human race. If Whites and Blacks, Senegalese and Nigerians can love each other in this way, how could a Congolese legitimately claim that he cannot share with another Congolese, because of a different ethnic origin?"* (1993 in "The Christian and national unity").

Today, we stress the importance of witness in mission. The witness of a community is itself evangelization. The Apostolic Exhortation "Vita Consacrata" insists on this point: *"Religious life continues the mission of Christ with another feature specifically its own: **fraternal life in community** for the sake of the mission"*. We have opted for larger communities so that some members can undertake extra-parochial activities. A parish working from a community base like this can only

gain in strength by the support that confreres give to each other.

Conclusion

So there are some directions or pastoral areas which are worth thinking about if we want to be missionaries in parishes. In the final analysis, I think it will be up to the individual Spiritan working in a parish as to whether he will be "just another parish priest" or "a missionary". Daily parish work can go in either direction. Perhaps it throws out a challenge to our houses of formation: how to transmit this missionary element into the classical structures of the Church, which have proved themselves throughout history and are not going to disappear tomorrow!

René Tabard CSSp

B.P. 1524

Brazzaville

Republique du Congo

ANGOLA: A REFUGEE APOSTOLATE

Lourenço Ndjimbu

Lourenço NDJIMBU, a young Spiritan priest of the Angolan province, has been in charge of the above parish in the diocese and administrative province of Benguela. There has been a huge influx of refugees into the parish, thus posing the problem of how to evangelise people living in extreme poverty. In this article he describes how, with the Christian community, he has attempted to tackle the problem as a parish priest and a missionary. Perhaps his efforts might be of help to others facing a similar situation.

The problem of the displaced populations in Angola became well known soon after the proclamation of independence on 11 November 1975. The war that broke out between the "liberation movements", i.e. the guerrilla groups fighting for the liberation of Angola from the colonial yoke, caused huge numbers of the population to flee from one place to another, and in particular to urban areas.

The parish of St. John the Baptist is in one of the suburbs of the port of Lobito (the second port in the country), in the province of Benguela (whose area corresponds to the diocese of the same name). Houses sprung up everywhere and the population increased at an alarming rate from 1975 onwards due to the arrival of the refugees. Everyone suffered from this influx, both the local population and the newly arrived.

The Immediate Consequences of the War

As everywhere else, here the fratricidal war was the mother of all evils. This internal conflict (which at present shows signs of coming to an end, hopefully for good), had, and continues to have, disastrous consequences deeply affecting Angolan society and, in particular, the missionary activity of the Congregation and the whole Church.

A Destabilised Society

Angola became a totally unstable society where misery, hunger, sickness, and death reached alarming proportions. People, finding themselves uprooted and deprived of every means of livelihood, became beggars, swarming over the streets of the main towns and besieging religious houses and parishes looking for alms, alongside hundreds of orphaned and homeless children, commonly known as *street children*. Without the material and psychological stability of their own homes they began to lose their family values and soon after were attached to no one and to nowhere. Sanitary conditions were either rudimentary or non-existent, so death increased among children and even adults.

The huge increase in the population and the lack of schooling led to unemployment, delinquency, robbery and corruption at every level of social, political and military life. All this was within the contact of dreadful government by the nation's leaders, who were more interested in their own advantage than in that of the people.

The Effects on the Parish

The parish grew rapidly with the onset of the civil war after independence in 1975. Divided into 30 base Christian communities, each with its own chapel, St. John the Baptist parish became the most densely populated of the diocese. And the one with most problems, given the majority of its members were displaced people - men, women, young people, children - who had been forced to leave their own lands with absolutely nothing, destabilised both morally and psychologically, frantically searching for a *safe* place in town. Thus we have a parish of people who were left to their own devices, discouraged, oppressed, with no protection whatsoever and suffering terrible injustices. This is fertile ground for putting into practice our Spiritan charism of being the *advocates, the supporters and the defenders of the weak and the little ones against all those who oppress them*(SRL 14).

OUR PASTORAL APPROACH AMONG DISPLACED PEOPLE

The Local Church: Where HOPE is Proclaimed

In the face of such suffering, when the future looks so bleak, the natural tendency would be to despair, give up the fight, be carried along by events, live without an ideal. It is precisely in this situation that the Church must profess its profound faith in *the God of Hope* and take this message of hope to people who cannot see any reason for hope, or anyone to hope in. She must always be the sign of hope.

In the midst of darkness, Christians believe that history does have a meaning, and they have hope because they believe in Christ. By its very nature, hope is closely tied to the dramatic and troubling periods of history. *This hope is not deceptive because the love of God has been poured into out hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us* (Rom 5,5). So hope does not desert us when Christ goes with us "*unrecognised*" in our hearts, as happened with the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24, 13-25), or when he sleeps in the boat tossed about by the waves (Mt 8,24).

Time and time again this was the message being announced by *the bishops of the Church in Angola*, pastors who lived up to their prophetic role all these years. The proclamation of the message of hope went even further than this, as many Christians, both lay and missionary, lived out their commitment even to the shedding of their blood, so that Christ might be the hope of all, including the politicians - that he alone might be "*the Way, the Truth and the Life*." In effect, the Church has been the "*voice of the voiceless*", the sure refuge, the wise counsellor. By every means the local church has been committed to living the faith and the Gospel in whatever it does, striving to put an end to every form of repression, violence and inequity.

The Spiritans and Displaced People

The problem of displaced people became more acute and pressing with the reopening of the war after the 1992 elections, a war of such violence as had never been seen in Angola's history. Hundreds of thousands of people had

to leave their homes, their villages and the smaller towns. Even in the major towns many of those who lived on the outskirts had to flee for their lives into the centre. The war struck many town suburbs, wiping out an untold number of lives. But, besides the centres of the major towns, the places felt to be most safe were the missions and parish centres, including religious houses. Thousands of people headed for them.

The immediate priority was to give them assistance. The majority had arrived with absolutely nothing - they were the *needy*, in the strictest sense of the term. One has to remember that at this time, the Church had been stripped of its possessions (thanks to the Marxist government) and was suffering, like everyone else, from the economic crisis that had been going on for the past ten years.

Joining the People in their Struggle

The Spiritans, each in their own area, asked themselves: what type of evangelization do we need for people deprived of everything, suddenly reduced to misery, to sub-human conditions? **How does one proclaim Christ to displaced people** who have no home, no clothes, no food, who may have seen their family wiped out, who are desperately trying to survive physically, morally and spiritually? The only way is *to join them in their struggle to survive*.

Thus *in Malanje* (a province to the east of Luanda, in the north) the Spiritans took as their motto: **"to save lives"**. It seemed meaningless to them to preach the Word of God and teach the catechism to people whose suffering was such that they would have been in no fit state to listen.

Their first task was to rescue the children who had been abandoned in their homes when their families were killed or stopped from returning home by warfare or blown up by a landmine or ambushed as they went to their fields for food. This was on top of the task of catering for the countless refugees who had fled to the mission or parish centre during the fighting. Even before Caritas and other organisations started helping the missionaries to deal with the problem, they were using their scarce resources to this end.

Our confreres had the huge and difficult task of feeding and giving medical treatment to so many who were undernourished and ill.

In Luanda, one of our confreres undertook to liaise with aid agencies in favour of the thousands of families who had taken refuge in his parish. Thanks to his efforts, tents were obtained to house more than ten thousand families and food to feed about thirty thousand people each day, as well as water and clothing. And he continued to minister to them spiritually.

In Benguela (a province in the south), a confrere in the Parish of Populo gave himself body and soul to alleviate the material and spiritual needs of thousands of displaced people who were crowded together in purpose-built campsites and villages.

In Lubango, in the province of Huila (to the south-west of the province of Benguela), the confreres split their time between attending to the material needs of the people (feeding multitudes of children and adults who flocked everyday to the parish), and doing their normal pastoral and catechetical work - and this in the biggest parish in the town. They have a secondary school for young people who have fled from the countryside.

At the Service of Displaced People in the Parish

The proclamation of the Good News of hope, especially among the poor, the displaced and the dispirited, is a fundamental task not only of the Church in Angola but of all who preach the Gospel. It is a special priority of our Spiritan mission in Angola. Jean-Marc Ela puts it well: *"The situation in which the poor and oppressed live is the place 'par excellence' for meditating Scripture and for understanding the faith"*.

The influx of refugees into the parish forces us to ask several questions, to rethink our traditional method of evangelization and to develop the ability to take initiatives. It is impossible to stand with arms crossed before so many brothers and sisters who cry out for help with their eyes fixed on us.

So in our parish we try **to transmit a Gospel full of life**, despite the signs of death which daily haunt the lives of the displaced and the poor. We attempt

to get across the message of hope, of the meaning of life, to these troubled people by helping them to live as full human beings. Therefore several services have been established:

Feeding the Hungry

- At least once a day we prepare a hot meal for the most undernourished. We would like to help all who come to the door for food, but our means are limited.
- The diocesan branch of Caritas and some other aid agencies provide a certain amount of food and other basic necessities. These are distributed by the parish branch of Caritas.
- We encourage each base Christian community - or Chapel, as we say here - to encourage its members to share what they have with the most needy among the displaced people and the poor, being careful to avoid any "parish paternalism".

Gathering the Orphans

- We set up an organisation to look after those who are abandoned, especially orphaned children and others who do not know where their families are. This serves either to find their families or to arrange for families in the parish to take in orphans.
- The education of the children and youth among the displaced is completely overlooked by the government structures, and so we are at present building a primary school for them. Later we hope to build schools for their further education, including a technical school. But *"from where shall come our help?"*

Getting People Back to Work

- Unemployment is a massive problem, especially among the youth. This presents a serious problem to any missionary, since it is the source of much delinquency and many social problems. So we have tried to set up small projects to provide some employment and help families earn their daily bread.
- We work with the diocesan Commission for Justice and Peace to denounce the violation of the rights of displaced people, to help them to work towards

reconciliation, and to try and solve the most urgent problems that crop up day by day. Our greatest hope is that a definitive peace will come about, something which, despite setbacks, we see as emerging. In the meantime, we keep before the minds of the people the need to return one day to their farming life, and to the habit of work, as the way forward to prosperity and to the development of the nation as a whole.

This is just a brief outline of what the Spiritan community in St. John the Baptist's parish in Lobito has been doing. Work with the displaced demands patience, gentleness, a listening ear, a great spirit of initiative and practical love. Fortunately our people, even those who are displaced, have not lost the meaning of life, nor the virtue of hope. Despite the difficulties that weigh them down, they continue to form Christian communities full of faith, dedication, and joy, and with much singing and dancing. Finally, I want to underline the importance of the support we have received from the international community, through organisations working here. Thanks to them, many great projects have been able to go ahead.

Laurence NDJIMBU, CSSp.
St John the Baptist Parish
C.P. 2075 LOBITO - Angola

"From bitter experience we know that the fear of "difference", especially when it expresses itself in a narrow and exclusive nationalism which denies any rights to "the other", can lead to a true nightmare of violence and terror. And yet if we make the effort to look at matters objectively, we can see that, transcending all the differences which distinguish individuals and peoples, there is a fundamental commonality. For different ways of facing the question of the meaning of personal existence. And it is precisely here that we find one source of the respect which is due to every culture and every nation: every culture is an effort to ponder the mystery of the world and in particular of the human person: it is a way of giving expression to the transcendent dimension of human life. The heart of every culture is its approach to the greatest of all mysteries: the mystery of God."

*(Address of Pope John Paul II to the United Nations.
05 October 1995)*

DUBLIN; MISSION IN THE SUBURBS

by Vincent McDevitt

In response to the call of the Irish Provincial Chapter in 1988, Vincent McDevitt, Paraic McDermott and Paddy Dundon were sent to Bawnogue, a disadvantaged area in the suburbs of Dublin. All three were close to fifty and had spent more than fifteen years in Africa or South America. Vincent here describes their insertion into this new situation, reflects on some of the questions that arose and gives us some of his ideas about the Spiritan missionary in a parish situation.

A Disadvantaged Area

Our arrival in the parish was the result of an appeal by our Provincial Chapter for new justice and peace projects: *"If feasible, two Spiritan Communities will be established in neglected and disadvantaged areas in Ireland"*. In dialogue with the diocesan authorities, the Provincial Council agreed to take on Bawnogue.

The parish of Bawnogue has about 1500 families, half of whom live in private houses. The area is almost 20 years old with a concentration of young families, and with a thousand children in the primary school. They were thrown together through new housing projects with little infrastructure or services, some fifteen kilometres from the centre of Dublin city. Unemployment runs as high as 70% on some streets. Many people ceased education at fifteen. There is a high number of broken marriages and of single parent families. Petty crime and drug abuse are common problems.

The Spiritan Team Prepares Itself

Before we moved into the parish, the three of us spent two days in prayer and reflection. Facilitated by a member of the Provincial Council, we drew up our **vision statement** declaring that we were going to live and work in the parish...*"to enable the people to discover their worth and dignity, and to respond with faith to the call of the Spirit in their everyday lives, in*

their homes and in their work-places and community, so that they may grow towards the fullness of life. Our Spiritan community life of prayer, simplicity, joy and sharing, shall be a source and means of our discipleship of Christ."

We spoke of our hopes and fears, our strengths and weaknesses and committed ourselves to work as **a team of three Spiritans, in partnership with the Salesian Sisters** and with the **growing participation and collaboration of all the people.**

In a Spiritan Community

From the time we started at Bawnogue, we decided to have morning and evening prayer in common, to cook for ourselves, to take care of our own house and to have a common purse. We set up a monthly community meeting and a weekly work meeting. As there was no parish centre, we made available to the people two of the rooms in our house. This gesture was much appreciated and it helped us to integrate more quickly into the community. It also gave us a sense of what was happening in the area.

On the pastoral front, though we worked together as a team of equals, we each took areas of responsibility. We were fortunate that we had complementary gifts in the sense that Paraic was good in administration and could make a great contribution in the schools, while Paddy was strong in the liturgy area and I had a strong inclination towards social problems. So though the three of us worked in all these areas together we each had opportunities of leadership.

In Partnership with the Sisters

We were well received by the people of the area. We met the Salesian Sisters who had been doing good work for ten years previously and had built up a great tradition of co-operation with the people, especially with the young.

We immediately formed a team with the Sisters and for the first few years, we met once a month or more. One of the Sisters is a full-time pastoral worker. We supported each other, trying to appreciate the variety of talents while searching for a common vision. We decided to organise our work

under seven headings: Liturgy, Pastoral Work in Schools, Social Problems, Formation, Youth, Administration and Finance.

In Partnership with All the People

We were very convinced that we should begin by building on what others, priests and lay people, had done before us. Our former mission experience opened our eyes to the opportunities available of co-operation with the lay people so that they could play an active part in the Christian and wider human community.

Those first few years saw the further growth of groups in liturgical ministry and youth work. In the social sphere, we had the birth of new groups such as the Women's Development Group, the Community Building Committee and the Unemployed Group. We established teams for the preparation of Confirmation and first Communion. This included leading the young in prayer and resulted in as much new growth for the leaders as for the candidates. Gradually we introduced short formation courses, especially at Advent and Lent.

SOME FURTHER QUESTIONS AND DEVELOPMENTS

Spirituality

My inspiration as a Spiritan working in the parish comes from the conviction that *we are all loved by God* and because of this, *deserving of the love of others*. We cannot truly say we love others or the poor or even that we believe that God loves us if we leave people in poverty. The God who loves expects us also to do the loving in a selfish world, especially the loving that will prevent the unnecessary suffering of his children.

The Eucharistic celebrations, where the bread is broken and shared among the baptised, where we openly declare that human beings are beloved daughters and sons of God, are hiding the truth if they do not result in a commitment to change the values and structures which exclude many. These sacraments have revolutionary power but have been tamed so that they no

longer clearly denounce the evil in our world nor announce God's dream for all of us: "*I have come so that you may have life in its fullness*" John 10,10).

When I am celebrating Baptism, I am aware of the love of God and the love of family and friends which surround the children, but I am also thinking of their real chances in the world, thinking of their education, and their environment. Will they really be loved to the extent that we will be concerned if they do not have a job or find real happiness?

The Church and Social Problems

I take it for granted that we should be involved in social problems but I notice that too many church people and their leaders try to move on one leg rather than on two. By that I mean love of God **and** of neighbour. The result is that the Church is less alive and has little relation to the lives of ordinary folk. But in practice I have found it difficult to link the problems in a harmonious way, especially the social problems of our area and the liturgies we celebrate in our church on Sundays. *With sadness, I notice the absence of those who suffer most.* The constant challenge remains. Personal charity or work, such as that of the Vincent de Paul Society, is always relevant and important but not an adequate response to the major social problems we experience.

The Church is called to respond in creative ways to *those who are left outside*, not simply to try to make itself stronger or have more members. I understand its mission as helping in personal and social liberation and discovering and celebrating the presence of God on this journey. I feel the need to move out of church space, out of the sacristy and into the world where God's Spirit is active. Many of our people have a low sense of self-worth and have little encouragement to develop their talents. Our community in Bawnogue has been neglected by the civil authorities and so I would like to see more efforts to bring needed facilities to the area.

Work with the Unemployed

With Susan, one of the Salesian Sisters, I began to work with the unemployed. This was difficult. In spite of our best efforts, they did not

seem to show interest and for a long time nothing seemed to work. We felt adrift in a sea of helplessness but decided not to give up; at least we were facing up to one of the serious problems of our area, and that was better than ignoring it.

Eventually, unemployed people took greater initiative, and together we established a group where their needs and hopes could be expressed. Many years later, a centre for the unemployed was born from these efforts. At first, social welfare information was the principle need addressed. As well as serving the needs of the unemployed, it turned out to be a good jumping-off ground for many other efforts in the community, and through them people are being helped to recover their self-worth. Hopefully, too, it is serving as a model for others that we Christians are called to be a force of liberation.

A Challenge for the Priest

Because many of us priests are outside family, outside the labour market and in the clerical structure of the church, *it is a challenge to feel for the struggling families*; harder still to see things from the point of view of the poor, or to be aware of the constant and daily grind for those short of money or opportunities. Even though nearly all the families in our area are struggling to get by, it is easier for us to get to know those better off and harder to encourage ministry for those who are poorer. They are more invisible. At the Eucharist, I feel the constant challenge to remember that the bread of life to be shared is also that "*which human hands have made*" and so is linked to work and unemployment! I have been disappointed by the lack of commitment to social justice on the part of many Church leaders. An example which comes to mind is the way we ignored the recent pastoral of the Irish Bishops, entitled "*Work is the key!*"

A Parish Team

In the past few years, as fruit of the on-going participation of the people, we have been moving towards the formation of a parish team. This is a very positive development and is a clear sign of growing collaboration. The team now consists of seven lay people, two sisters, and three priests, and it meets every month. It also helps by co-ordinating and supporting pastoral

activities. In this effort, we have received a great deal of real support from the diocese.

Our pastoral approach has been to respond with faith to the needs of the people and to support the efforts of existing groups. We are not short of challenges; helping to respond to the needs of young people, making a more creative input to sacramental preparation, helping to address the serious drug problem - these are just three examples among many. We have also been able to focus on wider justice and peace issues, and the people have been quite open to this in spite of the many local social problem. The criterion of Mass attendance would not be the most helpful or hopeful sign here but it is obvious that the people themselves get by with faith and that God is very much alive amongst us. There is also a steady growth of leadership, both in the Church and in the Community.

A Spiritan in a Parish

Here in Bawnogue, as in Brazil, I think I can say that *I am living and acting as a Spiritan*. In the first place, I am replying to the call of my province for a justice and peace project. I have been sent on mission into this neglected area. We have tried to live and work in a Spiritan community and in a pastoral team. Our **priority for the poor** has found its expression in different ways in this Dublin suburb; we felt it was vital to get out and listen to the needs of the people and to try to answer them.

In all this, I think we can claim to be in line with what Libermann recommended: *"Today, new needs are being felt; every priest, without leaving the place he has been assigned, must look carefully at these needs, probe into the wounds of society and make use of every opportunity he gets to find a remedy or at least a help for these wounds and needs"* (ND XI pp. 534-536).

We have always been aware of **the support of the Spiritans of our own Province**. We have also, as neighbours, two Spiritans who are full-time counsellors and have, with their skills, been instrumental in *"healing the broken-hearted and binding up the wounded"* of our area. Recently, my two Spiritan companions have been transferred; Paddy Dundon and Paraic

McDermott went on to new ministries in South Africa and Dublin respectively, while Joe Beere and Tony O'Boyle have joined us. With their gifts and experience, we will move ahead..

*Vincent McDevitt
Transfiguration Church,
Clondalkin, Dublin 22,
Ireland*

“Missionary activity demands a specific spirituality, which applies in particular to all those God has called to be missionaries.

This spirituality is expressed first of all by a life of complete docility to the Spirit. It commits us to being moulded from within by the Spirit, so that we may become ever more like Christ. It is not possible to bear witness to Christ without reflecting his image, which is made alive in us by grace and the power of the Spirit. This docility then commits us to receive the gifts of fortitude and discernment, which are essential elements of missionary spirituality. ...

Today, as in the past, that mission is difficult and complex, and demands the courage and light of the Spirit, ... ”
(Redemptoris Missio N° 87)

PARAGUAY: MISSION IN CHURCH - THE PASTORAL PLAN

Pierre Juveneton

Ordained thirty years ago, Pierre Juveneton worked for some twelve years in a rural parish in the Central African Republic. After a few years of study and a short time in formation, he is currently working in Paraguay.

"The responsibility for carrying on Christ's mission belongs in each place to the local Church. We, in keeping with the calling that is proper to us, participate in this mission" (SRL 13). As missionaries in parishes, our ministry is situated in the context of the pastoral plan of the local Church.

FROM A PASTORAL PLAN TO NO PLAN AT ALL

1972-1992: A Well-Defined Plan

The diocese of San Pedro was set up in 1978 by dividing the diocese of Concepcion. *The first Bishop* of this new diocese, a man who liked things well organised, came up with a Diocesan Pastoral Plan. Within the limits of "religiosidad popular", strongly denounced at Medellin, and using the already existing communities, he gradually planned and set in motion what he described as *"an evangelization that is completely viable: common action, together is what typifies its existence and execution (study, deliberation, decisions, execution, evaluation, shared responsibility for carrying it out)"*

Following these guidelines, (one could almost use the word "orders"), the communities were organised to carry them out, **both in the promotion of the faith** - Sunday celebrations, on-going catechesis, preparation for the sacraments, patronal feasts etc., **and social needs** - collective shops, farmers' committees, needs of peasant women, health care, the "pro tierra" commission. Every two or three months, the bishop would address a letter to

each community, pointing out what had to be done and how to organise it. *A period of crisis* began in 1989. The coup d'état and the transition towards democracy brought in changes that were slow but radical. Some time previous to this, our bishop had proposed various modifications to the Pastoral Plan but without provoking any real dynamism. There was a general *air of weariness*.

The Absence of a Pastoral Plan

In 1992, our bishop was moved to Ciudad del Este and his successor let us *follow our own pace*. Gradually, the limits of the Diocesan Pastoral Plan became clearer: practically no initiative from the communities and the progressive abandonment of social help through a lack of volunteers. These services were taken over by NGO's and peasant organisations which have more means at their disposal.

With the coming of democracy, **new values** made their appearance:

- *Liberty*: people re-assessed duties that they had felt obliged to observe out of respect or fear. They wanted to be initiators, not just the executives of a plan conceived by others, however good it might be.

- *Pluralism* appeared at all levels: new political parties, new peasant organisations outside and, sometimes, in opposition to the Church, new religious movements with chapels sprouting everywhere like mushrooms. A transition was needed from "Noah's Ark", which served well during the dictatorship, to the "Barque of Peter".

The period of the pastoral plan is now finished, and *the absence of a plan has weakened pastoral action*. It is obvious that the communities need to find a new impulse, a new and more interior dynamism. Obedience to directives from on high, even from a bishop, must be replaced by a personal responsibility.

LOOKING FOR A NEW IMPETUS

If one regrets the passing of the pastoral plan, this does not take away from what has already been achieved by the communities, and invites us to a new creativity. Let us look at some possible directions to be taken.

Lay People as Full-Time Partners

In my huge parish, the laity take responsibility, with great dedication, for the daily life of the communities. They are co-ordinators, liturgical animators, treasurers and each in their own way assures *the continuing presence of the Church* in that area. On Sundays, in practically every chapel, they bring together a small group of people for the celebration. Lay people organise retreats and look after bible study, and the activities of "*Fe y Alegria*". One has to admire the devotion and perseverance of these pastoral agents in trying to do their best.

Collaboration is found at all levels. The meetings which bring the pastoral agents together locally or at the zonal or parochial level give these lay people the chance **to participate in decision-making**. These gatherings are where one hears about the life of the communities. The delegates describe their more interesting experiences and their present difficulties. I join in as much as possible at the zonal and parochial level. It gives me the chance to share more closely with the communities. I have **two objectives**: on the one hand, to enlarge the horizons of the delegates by giving them a view that is wider and more explicitly tied to the Gospel, and on the other, to help them chose those things that will open up new ways for the future.

Support for the Poor Peasants

The poor will always be a priority for Spiritans. Coming from a place like the Central African Republic, it is difficult at first to appreciate that Paraguay is a poor country because it is so rich and fertile. But **the poverty of the peasants**, even if it is relative, is all the more disgusting in that the only reason for its existence is an economic system based on short term exploitation. It is not just a question of having to live with very little: there is something aggressive about this poverty, a deliberate impoverishment ("*el empobrecimiento*"). The peasants suffer less from not having very much

than from the injustice of being stripped of the fruit of their labours. Poverty is certainly there but, even more, **a sense of frustration and injustice.**

The problem is not one of production but of **commercialisation.** The peasant farmer is left with little choice: either he leaves his produce to rot in the ground, or he "gives" it to a middle-man, who takes his own profit. But the really big profits are made by those who lay down the law of the markets: a kilo of cassava that is bought from the peasant farmer at Resquin for 50 guaranis is sold again the following day in the Asuncion market for up to 900-1,000 guaranis.

How can the small producer *survive* in a system that favours the big operators who can so easily buy his products at a ridiculous price? To try to face up to the many problems confronting the peasants, we can turn to CEPAG, a non-governmental organisation that is run by the Jesuits of Asuncion. This organisation aims at setting up farmers' committees which will be places of education, and organisation, and will hopefully ensure economic survival for the small farmers. Two technicians and a Jesuit are working in the parish, running an educational team. They are also giving pastoral help, taking on responsibility for 11 of the 65 communities in the parish.

Works To Be Undertaken

In the Diocese, the Pastoral Plan, to a certain extent, had become a substitute for the word of God. So it is important that the Gospel should regain its centrality in order to renew the dynamism of the communities: hence the importance of the **classes of bible study** that are held each month. It is also essential that **the Sunday celebration** becomes a place to hear and be challenged by the word of God; a warm, family atmosphere must be created, where everybody feels free to take part. The Christians in our communities **need to experience God personally**, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, and to feel an ardent desire in their hearts to follow Jesus.

A renewal of catechesis is another indispensable task. *The contents must be revised* to stress the dignity of each person, encouraging self-esteem and self confidence. All should be helped to realise that they have a vocation to

follow. Solidarity must be stressed, and mutual help, which is the expression of true friendship amongst those who have little. *The style of teaching* must be looked at: theoretical doctrine must give way to a more participative way of sharing experiences. As most of the catechists can hardly read, there is a need to produce more suitable teaching material for them. **The fifth Latin-American Congress of Basic Christian Communities** took place in San Pedro from the 7 - 9 of August, 1996. This should help our communities to rediscover the dynamism and creativity that they had at the beginning.

BEING TRUE TO DIFFERENT COMMITMENTS

When working in a parish, there are different commitments to be kept in mind: commitments to the local Church and its project, to the people amongst whom one is living and working, and to the Congregation and its guidelines. It is not always easy to reconcile these obligations. Mission in a parish often simply means the day to day response to this mission as we see it, listening to people and their needs, and following certain basic orientations.

Day To Day Mission

During the week, I work in the communities, answering the numerous requests for the sacraments. For baptism, I stay for twenty four hours, usually eating and sleeping in the organiser's house. This gives me the chance for direct contact with the Christians. I set aside sufficient time for the celebrations of the sacrament and I try to have a more personal meeting with the pastoral staff, particularly with the co-ordinator. I visit the sick. I also take the opportunity to explain the various activities that have been launched by the parish: bible study classes, "*Fe y Alegria*", health care, etc.

Saturdays and Sundays are generally set aside for being with the co-ordinators of the different zones during their monthly meeting. As well as each one giving a report on what is happening in his or her community, we try to inspire one another with a new fervour. The atmosphere is usually friendly and optimistic. "Ipora" ("everything is all right") is the dominant feeling, but this does not mean that there are no disagreements. I find it easy

to see the presence of Christ amongst us when we are gathered together in his name like this. I generally come away strengthened from these meetings.

Contrary to those who see it as a priority, I have little faith in a "systematic formation", which would seek to establish a model of community. Such a model would hardly have roots in the culture and life of the people. I think it is much more important that they should go at their own pace based on their experience, that they should be listened to and trusted, that their disagreements be accepted. This would be the way *to give freedom to their own initiative*.

Our Poverty When Faced With All These Tasks

I often feel as though I am making things up as I go along because, at the pastoral level, there are not many working instruments that would help me to set up a more coherent approach. The amount of work to be done leaves little time or energy for reflection or for the study of the Guaraní language and the complex culture of Paraguay. Yet *it should be a priority if the work is to be well rooted*. Fortunately, following the initiative of a Spiritan confrere, a study group is being set up for the diocese. I have great hopes for it and I pray it will lead one day to a truly National Pastoral Centre.

Another source of suffering is that *many important sectors of society have been effectively abandoned*: businessmen, civil servants (particularly the many teachers), who hardly feel at home in our peasant communities. The setting up of "Justice and Peace", of civil and juridical formation, gets scant attention.

Feeling a very poor person when faced with such tasks has surely something to do with Libermann. I think I have journeyed somewhat from the desire for sanctity to the acceptance of the poverty on offer! To be in a Spiritan group where the sharing is enriching and the friendship genuine is like a breath of fresh air. We believe our work is *within the priorities of the Congregation* by our solidarity with the poor, Justice and Peace, the development of responsibility of the Christians, of their mission in the Christian and human community.

What have the Paraguayans taught me? To accept life gratefully as it comes, uncomplicated friendship, trust in Providence, "Dios mediante" ("with God's help"), a sense of humour. It all makes for a happy life!

Pierre Juveneton

Casa Parroquial

General Resquin (S. Pedro)

Paraguay.

“Religious practice of the poor go beyond the limits of Catholicism, and it is often outside those limits that remedies are sought for their many trials. Different doors are knocked at in the hope that at least a window will be opened somewhere! Thus their religious “syncretism” is an expression of the struggle to live yet another day.

This way of life which often makes appeal both to God and to the “celestial allies” is what I call the oral theology of life. At one and the same time God is involved in human distress and yet is above all distress since everyone, men, women and children can make God hear their suffering pleas, their desires for love, and their concrete expectations. This is no written theology. To write about God is a luxury the poor cannot afford. Quite simply, one lives on God, one speaks of God, one hopes in God. This is the theology of the majority of Brazil’s population, but rarely is it considered to be such.”

(Conflicting Models of Church and Society in Brazil, by Ivonne Gebara, CSA, From Trends in Mission Sedos. Orbis Books 1991)

AMSTERDAM: A MIGRANT APOSTOLATE

Marius Brands and Simon van Eck

PASTORAL SERVICE OF MIGRANTS

There are presently 35 parish communities of foreign origin in Holland, originating from all over the world. Some of those are established parishes, like ours, in Amsterdam, now in existence for more than 32 years. That means that they have the administrative and pastoral structures to function fully as a parish. Unlike most Dutch parishes, which have an ever-decreasing number of members, going up in age, the foreign communities count many young people in their ranks, the children of the so called "second generation" of migrants. One notices it both in lively liturgies with song and dance, and in creative ideas for the future.

The Present Situation

In our once so tolerant country, the policies regarding asylum seekers are becoming more and more restrictive. More often than not we, as a church, are the final safety-net for people who have been refused asylum, and, having exhausted all legal means, are obliged to leave the country. That often takes a certain time, and during that period they can find themselves, so to speak, on the streets, without money, without any assistance.

Put yourself in their shoes: you are a refugee, be it economic or political, often separated from relatives and friends. You are living in a foreign country that barely tolerates you, and of which you do not speak the language. You are eating strange food, and you find yourself in a reception centre with hundreds of people like yourself. Sometimes it takes years before you are told whether you have been granted refugee status, or whether you have to return to the country you have fled. Perhaps you are told that peace has now returned to your country, like Angola, Somalia, Zaire, whereas you know very well yourself that this is not true. The migrant apostolate in Amsterdam seeks to provide a vision for such people. In some aspects these

migrant parishes resemble the old catholic underground churches: they are there, even if hardly noticed from outside, and they flourish. However, their problems are often quite different to those of ordinary parishes.

A Pastoral Approach

In the eighties, the migrant apostolate chose language, rather than ethnic identity, as the constitutive criterion for setting up such parishes. At present, Amsterdam has 10 migrant parishes, served by 12 ordained ministers and 3 lay pastoral workers, plus a number of volunteers, men and women. The whole team gathers once a month to discuss a wide range of subjects. There is a Board, which takes care of fund-raising and establishes guidelines.

Once a year migrant parishes from all over the country organise a *national seminar*, on issues like liturgy, catechesis, diaconia, building of Christian communities, etc. In Amsterdam the migrant parishes have together set up a diaconal council with an emergency fund, from which these migrant parishes can receive aid according to previously established criteria. Furthermore the migrant apostolate in Amsterdam is represented on the Board of the *National Migrant Apostolate* and on the deanery council of the diocese of Haarlem. It meets at regional level with the various people in pastoral leadership, with the taskforce for refugees of the Council of Churches, and with an established working group dealing with those who have been refused asylum.

Groups of pastors are trained and coached together. And so, slowly but surely, the Migrant Apostolate is carving out its own place in the pastoral field. Because the invited guests failed to present themselves at the wedding feast, it is those at the street corners who are being invited in. We have met so many people at the street corners and on the squares: we really hope that now the time has come for them to be accorded some vital space..

FROM CAMEROON TO AMSTERDAM

Marius Brands

SERVING THE AFRICANS

When I left Cameroon in April 1986 I first went through a short sabbatical period in Paris. After a few months the Provincial asked me to take part in a diaconal project for Africans in Amsterdam. This project had been launched by the SMA fathers, but they wanted to make it into a common venture with us, the Medical Missionary Sisters and Cura Migratorum (the National Migrant Apostolate). In the beginning the project was set up for legal and illegal immigrants from Ghana.

Soon, however, many more Africans came to Holland, mostly from English speaking countries. They brought a lot of problems with them, the most important of which being their own status as illegal immigrants. So we had to start juridical procedures in the first place, in order to prove that they had entered the country as genuine refugees. We also had to try to get them on the social and medical welfare scheme, and to find housing for them. In the beginning all this was not easy for me, since I had to shift from the French language, which I used to speak in Cameroon, to English. I soon discovered, that, although I was now back in Holland, I could still fully live out my missionary ideal right here: *walking the road together with those who live on the fringe of society, offering them some perspective for a better future.*

The Anglophone Parish

After a year, the SMA continued the project on their own, and I was asked by the Episcopal delegate for the migrant apostolate to take charge of the English-speaking community in Amsterdam. This community (parish) was made up mainly of Irish, Americans, Filipinos, a few Africans and people from other nationalities, who all had English as their common language. For lack of space, the community gathered in two groups in different churches, and at different times, and this is still the case. From 1989 on, more and more Africans and Asians found their way to the English-speaking

community, resulting in a considerable increase in diaconal and social activities.

Through all this the role of our Parish was becoming clearer: to let God's promise of *integral liberation* become palpable in a situation of utter marginalization. That means: bringing about a society where people are *valued for what they are*, and where God is revealing Himself both in that deep human desire to be oneself, and as a constant call to everyone, at all levels of society, to respect this desire. What is at stake is the fulfilment of **the human person**, and the building up of a society where justice is done to each individual. What should be at the heart of our thinking and feeling is the human person, in his or her integrity, body and soul, mind and heart, intelligence and willpower, spiritual and physical. This is how it was for Jesus, and this is the very meaning of the Rules of our Congregation.

A Plane Crash

I myself experienced this in a very striking way on October 4, 1992. when a Boeing 747 crashed upon one of the most heavily populated areas of Amsterdam, hitting, among others, a big group of illegal African aliens. Just because they were here illegally, they could not claim anything from anyone. Some other volunteers and I took their plight to heart. We started to fight for them, involving lawyers, magistrates and other officials in our action. As a result of all this, after more than a year, 38 of them obtained legal status as refugees. The entire English- speaking parish joined forces in those difficult days in order to overcome a mountain of material problems. One of the fruits of this action was the forging of very close links between the African community, the parish and its pastor.

The Schengen Accord

This Accord has made it very difficult to be recognised and accepted as a refugee in this country. Borders have become more and more impossible to cross. Most people who have been refused access, and who have no legal means left to defend their cause, see the step into illegality as their only chance of survival. However, the new legislation regarding aliens in Holland makes it almost impossible for these people to earn money for their upkeep. As a consequence they often end up in the criminal world of drugs and

prostitution. So we are also trying to contact these people with the help of volunteers, and to persuade them, that there is no future for them here. Many of them then agree to go back to their country of their own free will. Through the services of an ad hoc organisation, we then arrange for their journey back home, and the parish provides them with some money or goods for their basic necessities when they arrive there. At the same time, however, we as a Church, continue *our political fight for more humane migration laws.*

Community Life

In Cameroon I mostly lived either on my own or with an African Priest and members of other religious communities. Here in Amsterdam I am living on my own, with a former Spiritan brother as a neighbour, with whom I spent 21 years in Cameroon. We meet regularly and he is working part time for the Spiritan Mission Procure at Halfweg. I enjoy good contacts with my fellow pastors in Amsterdam, and I am a faithful member of our Spiritan regional community, which meets at Halfweg once a month. In Gemert, I always take part in the meetings organised by the provincial team which bring together Spiritan migrant pastors, prison chaplains and our missionary team of Eindhoven. A large part of my time is spent on home visits with my parishioners. They, too, are part of my community. Together with them I continue my journey.

FROM BRAZIL TO AMSTERDAM

Simon Van Eck

Back in the Netherlands

It has been a difficult decision. For 25 years I was a missionary in Brazil, and this with great joy. I started with vocations work, in the junior seminary of Itauna. Later I accompanied our philosophy students in Sao Paolo. However, it is most of all the "ordinary" parish work, with simple and often illiterate people, in the slums of the Brazilian city of Anapolis, which I

cherish as my most precious memory. I discovered, after many years that they had been teaching me, the teacher, with all his degrees and knowledge from books. In Brazil I learnt to understand what the writer, Paolo Freire, meant when he said: *"Nobody can educate somebody else; we can only educate each other"*. It was a difficult decision to return to the Netherlands. Of course, my family lived there and many good friends but I had fallen in love with Brazil, with the people, their way of living, believing, hoping for a better future against all the odds.

After a short time, I had the good fortune to discover the Portuguese-speaking Parish in Amsterdam at the beginning of 1994. A Spiritan confrere had been pastor there for many years. Most of the parishioners are Portuguese who came to Holland in the sixties, as "guest workers". There is also, however, a large group of Brazilians. So the transition was not too difficult for me, in spite of the fact that the European cultural background of the Portuguese is quite different from the South American one. I took over as pastor and I am now working here with much pleasure.

Option for the Poor, Also in the Netherlands

Sometimes people ask me if I feel like a missionary in Holland. Working among vulnerable groups like migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and illegal aliens, I feel as much a missionary as in my days at Anapolis or Sao Paolo.

A considerable part of the Brazilian Church has made the option for the poor. I discovered this same option in line with the Gospel here in Holland, with its own proper accents, of course, but no less courageous or prophetic. One finds marginalised and dispossessed people here as much as in South America. It could well be that they are victims of the same world-wide system of social and economic behaviour. In that sense I feel fully a missionary, belonging to a Congregation which has proclaimed itself solemnly as *"the advocates, the supporters and the defenders of the little ones against all who oppress them"* (SRL 14).

Trade in Women and Forced Prostitution

A young woman, 25, let us call her Sandra, divorced, lives with her two children in her mother's house, in a big city in the north-east of Brazil. They live poorly, having trouble to make ends meet. One day, in the city centre, she meets a woman in her mid-thirties who starts to talk to her. Would Sandra not like to earn a lot of money in a short time, in Holland? She could have a job in a hotel for three months as a cleaning lady and a waitress, and would be able to put aside a lot of money for her children and her mother. Sandra accepts this attractive proposal. At Amsterdam airport there is a man waiting for her, carrying a sign with the name of her birthplace on it. After a long journey they arrive at a two-storey building. It is midnight.

The next morning, she realises that many more Brazilian girls are living in this house. Soon a bus pulls up, taking the ladies to "work". They reach a big night club, where the girls change their clothes. She is sure of it now: these girls are making themselves up to receive and to accommodate their "clients". Despite all the promises, she has landed up in the world of prostitution. Sandra resists as much as she can. She says that she is not fit for such work. Most of the girls find her haughty. *"It is our bread, our living, and many of our relatives in Brazil live from it as well"*.

For many days, Sandra remains locked up. She is not allowed in the night-club any more. She is hungry, homesick, feels abandoned, but she refuses to give in to prostitution. After a month or so the boss has had enough. One day she is driven back to the airport, given her passport and abandoned on the pavement. She is there all alone, in the middle of thousands of rushing travellers. Thank God, some friendly police officers take care of her. Through a colleague at the airport chapel we are alerted. Sister Josina, who has been active among Portuguese migrants in Amsterdam for 28 years, goes to the airport to meet her. Apparently it will take 5 more days before she can leave for Brazil. We decide to offer her our hospitality until then. After 5 days, Sr. Josina and I brought her to the airport. She had agreed to be questioned by officers of the migrant police, a special squad fighting against the trade in women. They wanted to know her story, because they were keen to wrap up this racket between Brazil and Holland. The questioning lasted three hours. In the meantime, the plane was waiting. She

insisted that we accompany her right up to the cabin door. Only at the last moment, when we said goodbye, did that long expected smile of relief break through. "Boa viagem, Sandra", we said. Once more she looked around, and said from the bottom of her heart: "*Nunca mais*", Never again!

Of course, things like this do not happen every day. But still, so many more stories could be told of deep human suffering, of ruthless exploitation, where human rights are trampled upon.

Only two Spiritans are working in the migrant apostolate in Amsterdam, in spite of the fact that this important work is listed among the priorities of the Province. But unfortunately, there is nobody else available. I am sorry that Marius and I do not form a community together. I myself am living in the community of Halfweg, where our mission procure is located. Although I enjoy this community, I still sometimes dream of a community in the heart of the capital, made up of confreres from Holland, and from some African or Latin American countries. The SMA have a team in Amsterdam, led by a Ghanaian confrere. Does not our Rule of Life say that "*community life is essential for our life and ministry*" (no 28)?

The Dutch Province, in terms of numbers, is approaching its end. Still I do believe in the Spirit of God, who blows wherever He will. Instead of looking back to the past, with a sense of failure, we must turn towards the future. It is not my prime concern that our Congregation should survive as the Institute it is now. History will tell how things will work out. No, for me *it is essential that we, all together, keep searching for new ways, new means, in order to keep "The Story of the Living Jesus" alive and handed on.*

ZAMBIA: AN AFRICAN MISSIONARY IN AFRICA

Joseph Tilisho

Joseph Tilisho, of the East African Province, has been in charge of the parish of Fumbo in Zambia for the last two years, a very poor parish with few resources of its own. Previously, he worked for a few months in a parish in Kenya and then in the Spiritan Junior Seminary in Tanzania, close to his own home. He talks of some of the problems faced by an African Spiritan working in his own continent, especially when succeeding expatriate missionaries from outside Africa.

How do we Spiritans live out our Spiritan vocation as religious missionaries in this Parish? What do I, an African, experience as a missionary, in my African continent? Certainly, experience varies from person to person and from place to place. I strongly believe that one's personality is very important in the accepting of the situation and circumstances in which one finds oneself.

Sent into a Poor Parish

The mission of Fumbo, in the diocese of Monze, was founded in 1948 by Irish Jesuits. In 1972, at the time of the independence struggle in Zimbabwe (then known as Southern Rhodesia), the mission, which stretches along the frontier, had to be closed because of fighting in that area. It was re-opened in 1984-85 and confided to the Spiritans.

The land is of poor quality, full of sand and rocks, and farming has never been easy. But since 1990, the area has experienced a series of severe droughts that have had a devastating effect on the people and discouraged them from farming. How the people survived this period is a mystery to me; many of them had virtually nothing to eat. Even wild fruit disappeared as a result of the drought. Consequently there is a drift of young people to the towns and cities as they cannot see much future in the village. So one of the basic challenges of an African missionary in such a situation, with no

possibility of outside resources, is how to help create some sort of future for the young men and women who are the future of this parish.

The Problem of Succeeding Expatriate Missionaries

Experience has shown that it has always been difficult for an African missionary to take over a parish from an expatriate. Of course there are always difficulties involved in any transition period, no matter if the hand-over is from an African to a European or vice-versa; culture, mentality, different approaches, different life-styles, family relations, resources from outside....everything is different. But the degree of difficulty and the length of the period of transition depends greatly on the attitude of the parishioners who also notice the differences. They have grown used to expecting certain things from their priest; with the arrival of an African, the possibilities open to him are often more limited, especially in a poor area like this where he has little chance of bringing help from outside. It can be a long process for the people to get used to the new situation.

The Extended Family

When I was working at Usa Seminary, near my own home, it was a big challenge, because of the extended family relationship; the peoples' notion that one has to help relatives put great pressure on me. As a religious, it is difficult to comply with this, and it is equally difficult for the relatives to understand the problem. I tried to think about it as an effort to understand them and find possible ways of explaining things to them objectively. It was hard. As it is said, *"a man is not an island of himself"*. I tried to discuss what I experienced with other priests and lay friends.

Some individuals, depending upon their family background, have gone beyond secondary level education and they are looked on as one of the "elite" of that area/village and the extended family. The fact that you are a religious missionary would mean nothing to them in this context. Having this kind of notion in mind, a relative looks towards this person for either advice or support. If someone comes for advice or support, you **have to share your time with them in listening to their stories**. One or two may not pose a problem but when it is more and very frequent, you find your duty conflicting with demands or pressures from outside you. Then you are

forced to ask yourself: is this what it means to become a priest? This problem does not go away when you move away from your own country; you will still be turned to constantly for advice and support. The needs and demands of the extended family can never be far from the mind of an African missionary, wherever he is sent.

Contrast with the Expatriate

If we compare this situation of an African missionary with that of our confreres from the northern hemisphere, we may see a clear distinction; their socio-economic and education structures are very different and their Governments have schemes for assisting the unemployed and the retired. This lessens the burden laid on people from the demands of the extended family relatives. As a result, he is relieved of many worries about his family so his work becomes efficient and more satisfying. I really admire those who, in spite of these family pressures, find great satisfaction in their work and are efficient in their duties.

PASTORAL APPROACHES

Our Plan of Action

I would like to outline the pastoral strategy that we have adopted in the difficult context of this particular parish. We are trying two approaches (apart from other daily parish activities) to living our ministry as Spiritans. We are working through and with the Basic Christian Communities by....

(a) following our system of seven steps of bible-sharing and looking into the life of the people and their problems and helping them to come up with solutions,

and

(b) implementing the African Synod of Bishops on the theme of "the Church as the Family of God". We focus this second approach on **youth** and I would like to expand on this a little.

Our Work with Youth

We try to accompany these young people in their lives, making them aware of the responsibilities ahead of them as future leaders of their own families, their communities and the parish at large. We encourage them to have some self-reliance projects and we meet them regularly. With this, we hope a strong bond and spirit of co-operation will be developed and talents will be discovered and encouraged, e.g. leadership, agricultural and organisational skills, charismatic gifts.

The youth here at the main centre, Fumbo, have proved to be very encouraging for us priests and the whole community. They have been very co-operative. Last Christmas, they staged a Christmas play and during the Easter Triduum were very active. It was said that a person visiting the centre would have thought that it was for youth only, as the elders were not present in big numbers compared to the Sunday attendance/Easter Sunday!!

Helping the Farmers

But we cannot neglect the older members of society. In 1994/95 we had a farmers' seminar and introduced an early maturing sorghum seed (three months as opposed to the local one which takes six to seven months). People have come to like this type of sorghum (Kuyuma). They hesitated at first, but after seeing it growing in our garden, they came for the seed and last year, many more people were happy to plant it and the agricultural officers in the area went around advertising it, encouraging the people to plant it.

Building Self-Confidence

We have been in this parish for almost two years now. At first, the people were naturally reserved but now they are becoming more open and co-operative. For example, we had an ordination to the priesthood of one of our parishioners. It was hard for the people to accept that the ordination should take place in our parish, seeing that it was the time of famine. After a lot of discussion and consultation, they eventually took courage and said they would do it and they did it extremely well. They committed themselves and struggled. It was a tremendous achievement and this has given them

confidence in themselves. I would say this ordination celebration has brought people together, touched the hearts of many and strengthened their faith. I would also say that the seed of vocation was sown in the hearts of some young people as a result. The future light is casting its rays now. As the vocation promoter for the Spiritans I am very happy. I have two applicants from this parish. Others will follow them.

Encouragement

In spite of all the hardship and poverty, the people are very welcoming, friendly and generous. We experience this especially when visiting the outstations and spending the whole day with them. We see how much they struggle to get food for us and the small gifts they give e.g. wild fruit of different varieties collected from the bush. The attendance at prayer meetings and liturgy under trees and small shelters is very encouraging. Attendance in the Basic Christian Communities is also encouraging, especially the participation and the openness. Going to the outstations is, in itself, an adventure tour. If we find the size of the congregation is not as great as it could be, we just console each other that we have toured the place, our eyes have seen how vast and different the land is and we have prayed with the few who were sent to us by God.

SOME DIFFICULTIES

Some difficulties have been already mentioned in relation to other issues discussed above. But I would like to stress particularly the problems of intellectual, material and spiritual poverty.

Intellectual Poverty

Educationally, some areas are completely cut off. They have no schools for their children, even though there are big numbers of children who are supposed to be school-goers. There are others who have completed school but have never had the chance to learn anything. If there is no primary education what kind of development can be expected? They cannot read, they cannot write. Preaching and catechetical instruction for them has to be just oral stories. When one is given education, the mind is developed and

exposed to thinking. This fundamental basic right for the child is missing, so what can you expect from a person growing up in this environment? I wonder what Claude Poullart des Places would have done if he had visited these children?

Material Poverty

Most of our difficulties as African missionaries working in Africa spring from economic-related problems. These difficulties are not faced by us alone but by all ministers. They are harder for those who have no financial help from outside. The people are living below subsistence level. They have poor clothes, poor housing, poor nutrition, poor medical facilities, poor road networks and an almost total lack of clean water. This may sound exaggerated and too general, but it is a true picture of most of the areas we cover in our apostolate.

The local Ordinary thinks that the Church here can support its priests and their pastoral activities, but this is far from the reality. He is doing his best to support us but, given the situation, one may be tempted to overlook this support. The Congregation supports us and has encouraged our presence in this mission. The financial help received from "Cor Unum", however little, is very much appreciated by the group.

Spiritual Poverty

Integral evangelization is not fully accomplished if the intellectual and material needs are not met in some degree. If things are otherwise, how can one really interpret the key message of the Good News? What is Good News to these people? When people have not eaten well, they do not come to church, neither do the children come for catechetical instructions. Even in some places where there are schools, children do not attend if they have had no food to eat that day. For ourselves, if we do not have the money, how can we support seminars and workshops for catechists, preachers and Sunday service leaders? We are two priests serving twenty-one Mass centres and other people want us to open more centres for them. We hope and pray that some day solutions to these problems will be found.

I want to conclude by saying that our being here is a response to the Spiritan call to work among the poor, the abandoned and where the local Church finds it hard to get personnel. This is living the charisms of our founders. Our work is first evangelization. Our understanding of first evangelization is the preaching of the gospel to people who have never heard it, and making the people aware of themselves as the Church, the Family of God, and of the duties that they have towards themselves, the community and the Church.

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Refugees in the world.

Origin	Main countries of asylum	Total
Afghanistan	Iran, Pakistan	2,745,200
Rwanda	Zaire	2,257,000
Yugoslavia (former)	Croatia, Germany	843,900
Liberia	Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea	794,200
Iraq	Iran	702,100
Somalia	Ethiopia, Kenya	546,000
Eritrea	Sudan	422,400
Sudan	Uganda, Zaïre	398,600
Burundi	Tanzania, Zaïre	389,200
Vietnam	China, Hong Kong	341,600
Azerbaijan	Armenia	299,000
Angola	Zaïre, Zambia	283,900
Sierra Leone	Guinea, Liberia	275,100
Mozambique	South Africa	234,500
Chad	Sudan	211,900
Myanmar	Thailand, Bangladesh	203,900
Armenia	Azerbaijan	201,500
Ethiopia	Sudan	188,100
Mali	Mauritania, Algeria, Burkina Faso	72,700

These statistics don't include the almost 3,000,000 Palestinian refugees and speak only about those who left their country of origin. The figures are not fully correct, because not all the countries give figures.

(Source: UHCR 1995).

LIBERMANN AND PARISH WORK IN EUROPE

Paul Coulon

Paul Coulon spent four years in Congo, principally as a journalist with "La Semaine Africaine" (Brazzaville). Currently, he is teaching at the Institut Catholique in Paris. He has made a speciality of Spiritan sources, above all, Libermann. He is the editor of the revue "Memoire Spiritaine" and also works with "Spiritus" and "Pentêcote sur le Monde".

The historian lives in time, in all time: in the past, but also in his own time and even in the future. It is not abnormal that the questions he asks of history should be inspired or coloured by the preoccupations of his own day, but we need to know this¹. So it is quite valid to turn to the 19th. century Libermann today and ask the question: did he foresee that the Spiritans could work in Europe, not by way of exception but in line with their particular vocation?

To find the answer and to avoid all possible contention, I will concentrate on two texts from the years 1850 and 1851, the period when he had already become the eleventh Superior General of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. By that time he had gone through a long process of reflection for the purpose of the integration of the *Holy Heart of Mary* into the *Congregation of the Holy Spirit*, which was finalised juridically in 1848.

The best evidence we have is contained in the crucial and little known text entitled "*A Note on the Congregation of the Holy Spirit and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and on its works*" (May 1850)². This text

1. See the recent "Douze leçons sur l'histoire" d'Antoine Prost (Paris, Seuil, 1996, coll. Points H 225), the fourth lesson: "Les questions de l'historien", p. 79-100
2. Published for the first time in P.Coulon and P.Brasseur, "Libermann, 1802-1852. Une pensée et une mystique missionnaire", Paris, Le Cerf, 1988, p. 661-669

shows Libermann reflecting on the history of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit since its origins (it is the only text where we find the name of Poullart des Places from his own pen), on that of the Holy Heart of Mary, on the reasons for their union, on the present state of the Society and its works. In other words, he talks of the original inspiration and the spirit in which the Congregation offers to those thinking of joining a very large spread of works in "pagan missions" (Africa), in "colonial missions" (the islands), but also in Europe.

Then at the beginning of 1851, he received a letter from his long-standing friend, Dom Jean Sallier³. He was in the Charterhouse of Montrieux, in the Var. There, the "solitaries" were few in number and did not live in a large monastery but in houses without cloister. Many people were going up to see the monks, who were very much aware of the spiritual sufferings of that region in which religion had never been really "restored" after the Revolution⁴. So it was a missionary concern that was behind the letter that Dom Sallier sent to Libermann in early 1851.

Our Poor Towns And Villages

We are lucky enough to have this letter of Dom Sallier. Its style is as original as the character of its author. It consists of numbered questions, which makes it easier to understand the replies that Libermann made to each point. Here is the essential of what Dom Sallier has to say.

"In the name of the Holy Heart of Mary, my brother, my friend, my dear missionary: For some years, I have been in our Charterhouse at Montrieux, in the Department of Var. I would be very happy if you would come to found one of your houses in the south of France. I have no means for bringing this about, but if the good Lord inspired you to do something about it, I hope I could find the necessary.

3. See Dom Victor-Marie Doreau, "Vie du Père Dom Sallier de l'ordre des Chartreux, 1806-1861", Paris: Retaux-Bray, 188, XIV-384 p.

4. See Gérard Cholvy, Yves-Marie Hilaire, "Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine", t. I: 1800-1880, Toulouse: Privat, 1985, p.299

I want you to answer the following: 1. Will your missionaries, while they are in France, work for the sanctification of people by giving missions in parishes? 2. Will they work for the sanctification of souls in the place where they live? 3. Are their churches open? 4. Do they give enclosed retreats to ecclesiastics or others? 5. Which places would you prefer to come to? 6. Would you prefer to be in a town, either near or further away? 7. Would it be sufficient to give you a premises and let you know the condition of that place? 8. Would you be happy just to have the use of the place, and for how many years? 9. Apart from the place, what else would we need to give you for your upkeep: and what other points can you foresee?....Come, my dear Libermann, and bring to our poor towns and villages the limitless charity of Jesus, the humble, loveable, tender, desirable motherhood of Mary. Amen. Amen".

The Reply of Libermann

Libermann's reply, dated May 30, 1851, can be regarded as his final word on the subject, a sort of last will and testament. He died nine months later. Before summarising his main principles under a few headings, I will quote the part of the text that I consider central to the matter⁵:

"The proposal that you have put to me fits in well with the spirit of our Congregation. Our main aim is the evangelization of the poor. However, we are principally targeting the Missions, and in the Missions, we have chosen the most miserable and abandoned souls. Divine Providence has led us to work for the Blacks of Africa or the Colonies; there is no doubt that these are the most miserable and abandoned people of our day.

"We would also like to work in France, but always keeping the poor as our primary aim, without, however, abandoning those who are

5. ND XIII, p. 170-173. In the official compilation manuscripts of the writings of Libermann (the volumes known as "of Cluny"), in Arch. CSSp, Volume VI: "Various letters of which we do not have the original", Letter no. 189, p. 705.

not. In France, we would take on preaching in country parishes, as well as, and above all, working for the people of the poor working class in the towns, whose needs seem to us to be the greatest at the moment. To do that, it would always be better to live in an extensive and, as far as possible, industrial town, where there is a large number of workers and where corruption and irreligion are normally at their greatest. In this way, we could approach these people in their own place and try to influence them as much as possible: normally, they cannot be contacted by the parochial clergy because they do not come to church.

"So the works we would take on would be extra-parochial. I have always believed that those living in religious communities should guard against interfering with the work of the parish clergy and, as far as possible, they should direct the people to attend their own parishes. We would have people in our own churches only if the Bishop was in agreement. If it pleased the Lord to give us works in the vineyard of France, we would only be willing to work in complete understanding with the Bishops and in union with the local clergy. I was forgetting about the enclosed retreats. We accept clergy for retreats: as regards lay people, we have decided nothing, either for or against. We would decide according to the circumstances.

"Regarding finance, we only ask for enough to live on; we are too poor to make the least sacrifice. It takes us all our time to support the Noviciate. The Heart of Mary, who looks after her children, will not abandon us. However, we have to live. (You could perhaps help us in this respect by sending us some mass intentions).

"I do not think we need to go into details here about the founding of a house. There will be plenty of time when God's moment arrives and you have a concrete proposal to put to us. At the moment, founding a new house is out of the question; those already started will take up all the available personnel for the next three years.

"Meanwhile, if some of the people wanting to join the Congregation seemed to be suitable for working as priests in France, we would accept them and have them working in this country. It would not be right or proper that they would make staying in France a condition for their entry: we would not be able to accept them under those conditions. They have to present themselves without any strings attached. But if we see that they have a taste for working in France and have the necessary qualities, we would be happy to employ them here and would certainly not send them on the missions..."

A Proposal that Fits in with the Spirit of the Congregation

Libermann answers all the questions put by Dom Sallier. The basic reply is clear: "*The proposal that you have put to me fits in well with the spirit of our Congregation*". The basic option is *to evangelise the poor*, and amongst them, the poorest and most abandoned.

- For the moment, these are the Blacks, either of Africa or the Colonies, and historically, Providence brought us into being for that task.

- But our vocation is also valid for other types of poor people; for example, the non-evangelised poor of France, particularly the workers, hence the expressed preference for the new world of the big cities (Mgr. Truffet, in a letter to Libermann, talks of "*the poor workers, the Blacks of Europe*"⁶).

-The works will be extra-parochial, We must not compete with the diocesan clergy nor replace them in the parishes: we should rather try to do what the clergy cannot do and reach what they cannot reach (Cf. Poullart des Places): the margins, the frontiers, the most difficult. Contact should always be maintained with the Bishop.

-We will preach retreats, above all for clergy: support for the clergy is fundamental (he said the same thing about the African clergy), and why not the lay people as well?

6. Truffet to Libermann, at sea, April 15, 1847, regarding the social work of M. Germainville at Bordeaux: ND, IX, p. 431-432.

-As regards finance, we just need enough to live on.

- In practice, we have to discern God's moment: we cannot do it at present because of previous commitments, but the day will come.

- Recruitment policy: we would not accept people if they come with conditions, but we would accept those *with a taste, a vocation and the ability for work in France*.

Conclusion: Geography Does not Define Mission

Mission is dictated by a movement of divine love, not by geography. This idea is crucial to the thought and the journey of grace made by Libermann. Having been seized by Christ at the age of 24, having become an exile in the house of his own father and passed through the fire of a long exodus, it was the compulsion of love which made him found a missionary congregation whose members pledged themselves entirely to announce the Gospel *"amongst the poorest and most abandoned souls in the Church of God"*. He added the following precision: *"The Mission that Our Lord is giving us **at the moment** is that of the Blacks, which eminently fulfils these conditions"* (1840).

As a son of Israel and of its Book, Libermann is well aware that God expresses himself through history, that we have to live the *"Today"* of God and look for the signs of the times. And times change. Libermann, as a friend of the Ozanam family, must certainly have seen the strong article that Frédéric published a few days before the revolution of 1848. Its conclusion was, *"Let's go to the Barbarians!"* Ozanam is saying that the mission of the Church in Europe is turn *"to this democracy, to this people who do not know us"*, towards *"the poverty that is loved by God"*.

In 1851, Dom Sallier pleaded in the same way: *"Come, my dear Libermann, and bring to our poor towns and villages the limitless charity of Jesus"*. While continuing to keep the work for Blacks as his priority, Libermann accepts the request of his friend in principle. The needs of the new industrial world appeal to his missionary spirit and fit in with his initial inspiration. And he chooses by preference *"the poor working class in the towns, who*

seem to be in the greatest need at the moment", rather than the people in the countryside.

Libermann does not have a missionary theory; he has a sensitive heart, full of the love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For him, there is no such thing as a "mission country" or an evangelical hunting-ground: "*when God's moment arrives*", he will be ready to be a missionary in France. The extreme flexibility that he shows in the face of events and obstacles comes from his radical poverty. He is, as it were, plugged into the heart of God, of which mission is simply an overflowing to all men throughout their history. He is a mystic who never descends into missionary politics or ecclesial marketing, but who has the audacity of the poor man who, like Jesus himself, has nothing to lose, apart from his life.

The Spirit manifest himself in a special way in the Church and in her members. Nevertheless, his presence and activity are universal, limited neither by space nor time. The Second Vatican Council recalls that the spirit is at work in the heart of every person, through the "seeds of the Word", to be found in human initiatives - including religious ones - and in man's efforts to attain truth, goodness and God himself."

The Spirit offers the human race "the light and strength to respond to its highest calling"; through the Spirit, "mankind attains in faith to the contemplation and savouring of the mystery of God's design"; indeed, "we are obliged to hold that the Holy Spirit offers everyone the possibility of sharing in the Paschal Mystery in a manner known to God". The Church is aware that humanity is being continually stirred by the Spirit of God and can therefore never be completely indifferent to the problems of religion" and that "people will always ...want to know what meaning to give to their lifew, their activity and their death". The Spirit, therefore, is at the very source of man's existential and religious questioning, a questioning which is occasioned not only by contingent situations but by the very structure of his being.

The Spirit's presence and activity affect not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions. Indeed the Spirit is at the origin of the noble ideals and undertakings which benefit humanity on its journey through history. ...
(Redemptoris Missio. N° 28)

THE SPIRITAN IN A PARISH

the editorial team

This reflection on the theme of "the Spiritan in a Parish", based on the preceding articles, completes this version of "the acts of the apostles" according to the Spiritans. On this occasion, it is being done by the editorial team. The story will remain incomplete until we have your contribution: your reactions, reflections, your own experiences. We hope that, beginning with the next edition, we will have a "Forum" where all will have the chance to express their thoughts. The directions to be taken by our mission today is the concern of us all.

Many of us, perhaps the majority, live out mission in a parish: one that is newly-born, growing up, or already well-developed. Bearing in mind the renewal of the Church and her mission, the question is not, or is no longer, **whether** we can live our Spiritan vocation in a parish setting, but rather **how** we can do it.

Is it possible to identify certain traits that we would see as *typical* of our Spiritan life and work? By "*typical*" we do not mean they are exclusive to ourselves; they are all shared, in one way or another, by others. But it is none the less true that it is a package of inspirations and choices which makes Spiritans what they are: inspirations of our founders, our traditions, our choice of work, the way we set about things etc...

A Desire to Be Spiritan

Reading these testimonies on "mission in parishes", one is struck by *the pervading wish to be Spiritan* in all our work as religious missionaries: "I think it is Spiritan..."; "this seems to fit in with the idea of Libermann...". Rather than try to express their feelings in words and theories, Spiritans respond practically to the needs and calls of the situation in which they find themselves. From within this response, which is permeated by a certain

"family spirit", there shines this desire to live out the Spiritan vocation, even if it is not fully realised or articulated.

This attitude seems to be *fundamental*. It reflects a concern to answer the plans that God has for our Congregation, as well as a desire to play our part in the "*mission of God*" in the world. As the theologian Yves Congar puts it, by working in a particular parish, the whole world becomes my parish.

This fundamental attitude certainly sums up our missionary life and work. The articles reveal a great diversity according to the particular context in which they are working, a diversity also coming from the origin, formation, experience and age of the contributors. Our Rule of Life contains the Spiritan ideal; to strive towards it as much as we can is surely the realistic ideal, written not on paper but on "hearts of flesh".

Within this diversity, we can discern *common directions and lines of action*.

"Go Out to Meet People"

How can we be missionaries in a parish? The confreres have given us some suggestions in their articles. One idea, inherited from our ancestors, is expressed in these terms: "*As far as possible, not much office work but a great deal of home-visiting....Nothing can replace meeting people in their own homes*"; "*I accompany the communities, the Christians...letting them walk at their own pace, listening before speaking, trusting them*"; "*I feel the need to get out of the limits of 'the church' and dive into the world, where the Spirit of God is every bit as active*"; "*A good part of my time is devoted to visiting the parishioners in their homes*".

This "going out" to meet people on their own ground shows how much we *value* them and creates a whole *network of relationships* that is so important. This is particularly so in the African context of the "Church as Family". It is a modest step that allows us to listen to them, to understand their life and surroundings from the inside, to experience what they are living and to share something of ourselves with them. In a way, we *incarnate* ourselves into the people who have been confided to us. We

believe that the Gospel is at work in this sharing, the Gospel that gives life to people. The missionary's steps are turned towards those who are near to the Good News and those who are far away from it, making no distinctions. One confrere states unequivocally, *"In the parish, we are involved in primary evangelization"*.

We can easily recognise the thrust of contemporary mission in this idea of *"going out to meet people"*. Looking for the characteristic of mission today, Fr. Michael Amaladoss s.j., a famous Indian theologian, uses the striking image of *"mission as a pilgrimage"*: to get out, listen to people, discern what God is doing with them and through them, walk with them and go with them as far as God wants and how he wants. Here we experience *the key-concepts of mission*: dialogue, proclamation, inculturation and liberation.

Even more profoundly, this movement is a reflection of the journey of Jesus, who went out "to become flesh", becoming one of us, announcing the Good News in his travels and meetings. We go out like the *"sower who went out to sow"* (Mt. 13,3), and carrying in our baggage the promise of Jesus: *"I am with you..."* (Mt. 28,20).

A Priority to Be with the Poor

In this outward movement towards people, the poor remain our priority, even if we are involved in so many other activities. This emerges strongly from the contributions of the confreres in such differing situations. Several times, there is reference to the words of Libermann, quoted in SRL 14: *"We count the following as constitutive parts of our mission of evangelization: the "integral liberation" of people, action for justice and peace, and participation in development. It follows that we must make ourselves "the advocates, the supporters and the defenders of the weak and the little ones against all who oppress them" (Règlements 1849, N.D. X, p.517)*

A few quotations from our confreres will throw further light on their approach to the poor: *"To join the people in their fight for justice"; "Take part in the building of a society where people's value is recognised"; "How does one announce Christ to refugees who have no home, no food...struggling desperately for physical, moral and spiritual survival?"*

The only solution was to join them in their struggle for survival...The Spiritans have taken as their motto, "to save lives"; "The Eucharistic celebrations, where the bread is broken and shared among the baptised,... are hiding the truth if they do not result in a commitment to change the values and structures which exclude so many".

It is heartening to see the initiatives undertaken by confreres in response to situations of great suffering. The poor are still on the increase in our world, which was described recently in one journal as *"a vast factory for turning out poor people"*. ("Le Monde diplomatique"). Faced with this phenomenon, where we feel so helpless, it is right to insist on the need for **strong structures** to fight for and with the poor. The parish gives us this opportunity.

The Parish as a Missionary Community

The question remains; *how can I be a missionary in a parish?* We have inherited a long tradition, from those who have gone before us, of calling on the laity to play their part in mission. Since Vatican II, this tradition has been given a new impetus in local Churches and we are discovering in it ever more opportunities.

The parish is a community responsible for mission. Mission within the parish is the concern of all the Christians. Having been baptised in Christ, they share in his life and work. If the Church, the People of God, is defined as *"missionary by its very nature"* (A.G. no. 2), then this applies equally to the parish which is *"the Church in a particular place"* (Boras). This concept of parish is having an increasing effect on our pastoral practice.

The parish is a ministerial community. The parish, which makes present *the ministerial Church in a particular place*, also sees itself as a ministerial community in the service of the Gospel within both the Christian and the wider community. To make sure that this service is available, "the Spirit distributes different gifts to different people, just as he chooses" (I Cor. 12:11) and "the particular way in which the Spirit is given to each person is for a good purpose" (I Cor 12:7 of the whole of this Chapter).

The contributions of the confreres show this sense of ministerial community when they speak of "making lay people aware of their responsibility", "forming them", "making up a team with them", "looking for collaboration at every level" etc. These are all eminently missionary efforts; the lay people become the **agents of mission**. To answer the needs of the Christian and wider community, mission has always shown itself to be inventive in the creation and development of relevant services and ministries. Much research is going on at present into services and ministries, basing itself on pastoral experience. On this subject, we recommend the book of Bernard Sesboüé: *"N'ayez pas peur! Regards sur l'Eglise et les ministères"*, DDB, 1996.

The parish made up of small communities. The pastoral practice of creating small ecclesial basic communities is now widespread in the Churches of different continents. *"The Church as a Family cannot reach her full potential as Church unless she is divided into communities small enough to foster close human relationships...places engaged in evangelising themselves so that subsequently they can bring the Good News to others"* (Ecclesia in Africa no. 89). In this way, the Gospel **goes out from the centre**, permeates the milieu in which people live, addresses itself to the actual questions and problems that those people face and reaches out to those who are furthest away. The Christian brings the strength of the Gospel, which has the power to transform people, their milieu and society at large.

Agents of their own liberation. However useful or necessary material aid might be for the poor, our confreres go further than this in their articles, underlining the necessity of making the poor the agents of their own liberation. In the Dublin suburbs, the unemployed, after their initial reticence, decided to create a "help-centre" for those who are seeking work. In Angola, amongst the refugees who have lost everything including hope, the Spiritans try to *"keep before the minds of the people the need to return one day to their farming life, and to the habit of work, as the way forward to prosperity and to the development of the nation as a whole"*. In Paraguay, amongst the exploited peasants, *"the contents of the catechesis has to be revised to stress the dignity of each person, encouraging self-*

esteem and self confidence". This "enabling of the poor" is one of the currents that is emerging in mission today.

Mission within the Church

In the past, missionary institutes took on the responsibility for whole territories. Today, it is the local Church that is responsible for mission in its own area as well as being co-responsible with the other Churches for the universal mission. So mission in a parish has to be seen in this context: *"We are participating within the Church in the mission of Christ"* (SRL 11); *"Any particular work is taken on in communion with the Church as it is in our time"* (SRL 13). Let us try to list a few special qualities that should characterise our Spiritan vocation.

In solidarity with the people. It is above all in the difficult situations that one sees the deep attachment of the Spiritan to the people. In common with other equally admirable missionaries, he shows a solidarity with the community that will go as far as risking his life, as has been the case with some Spiritans in the past. In the parochial context, this solidarity seem to be fundamental; it extends not just to the local Church but to all the people.

"Love, and do what you will" (St. Augustine). As with Christ, the source of this solidarity is simply love, a quality greatly stressed by one of our contributors. Libermann talked of *"charity above all things"*. It appears that it is evidence of this love for all the people which evokes, more than anything else, a positive response from the people towards the missionary. .

Working for communion between Churches. This idea of communion between Churches, so much stressed in our day, can never be far from the mind of the missionary with his sense of the universal Church. He does not arrive in a local Church with ready-made answers, to do his own thing in his own closed world. As we see in the articles, he is rather somebody prepared to listen, open to ideas, ready to work with others at all levels. As members of an Institute serving the universal mission, the bishops expect us to be witnesses to other Churches, playing our part in bringing about the communion of Churches beyond all national frontiers.

Other expectations. Sometimes, we can get a better understanding of our Spiritan characteristics by looking at what others expect of us. Seeing intercultural Spiritan communities growing up in their Churches, the Bishops of Congo encouraged us to be witnesses to the possibility of brotherhood *"loving each other despite the difference of language, race and customs"*. When the problem of recruitment of vocations arose in the Churches that we used to call "the missions", the bishops saw in the missionary institutes *a possible way for the local Church to be missionary in its turn*, taking up its *co-responsibility* with the other Churches in the universal mission. When the Congregation started moving in the direction of Asia, a Pakistan bishop was eager to welcome us because, as he put it, *"you can bring continuity to projects"*.

Within the Church. These reflections have not gone into the various concrete problems that can arise when we work in parishes. Many of them can be solved by dialogue, contracts and establishing fraternal relationships. To look further into the concept of the parish as the embodiment of the Church in a particular place, we recommend a recently published book by Alphonse Boras, entitled *"Les communautés paroissiales, Droit canonique et perspectives pastorales"*. (Paris, Cerf, 1996, 342 p.)

Being a Spiritan in a Parish

Basing ourselves on the articles of our confreres, we have tried to look at **how** we can be Spiritans when we work in parishes. It remains to make a few other points to round things off:

- **Being sent by the Congregation** is the bottom line for being Spiritan in a parish. When we are sent, we are always taking part in the plans of the Institute and, by the same token, in the plans that God has for our Institute.
- The witness of the articles show that we **give preference to poor parishes**, those which are in neglected areas or hardly evangelised. We are happy to leave the large, self-sufficient town parishes to the care of the local clergy.

- When confreres from the southern hemisphere are sent into poor parishes, they often experience **great financial difficulties** in launching projects or even surviving. They do not normally have the possibility of getting help from outside, as is the case with many from Europe and North America. Fortunately, there is some help from solidarity within the Congregation.

- The geographical criterion for mission has disappeared; **we can be missionaries in parishes in every continent**. *"Working among vulnerable groups like migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and illegal aliens, I feel as much a missionary (in Europe) as in my days at Anapolis or Sao Paolo"*.

- The realistic Spiritan ideal is **that which is possible for each person** depending on his age, health, and a host of other factors. We must not get discouraged when we look at the work of those who are younger and stronger than ourselves. We are fully Spiritan when we are doing our best according to the different circumstances and different phases of our lives. And this is equally valid for our work in parishes.

- **Belonging to a religious family should be a great source of strength**. Unless he deliberately isolates himself, a Spiritan working in a parish is never alone. He can count on the support of his confreres, his circumscription and the Congregation. In collaboration with his brothers, he can undertake short or long-term projects, take risks, open up to the future.

- The articles make many references to **community life**. This subject will be examined in the next edition of *"Spiritan Life"*.

- Apart from the article which reflects on the love of God and neighbour, the Eucharist, and the implications coming from commitment to the poor, the confreres say little about **the spirituality which underlies their action**. But in fact, it can be seen everywhere; it is what is called today a **"contextual spirituality"**, discerned and lived in differing situations. It is the generous response given to the cries and needs of people, while always accompanied by the feeling of being a *"very poor person when faced with such tasks"*. In a word, it is this consecration of the religious to the mission, this giving of self - even at the risk of one's life.

- During one of our conversations on mission in parishes, somebody came out with the following: "Things can't be that bad if lay people are asking to join us in the Congregation!". An encouraging thought for us all.

- Let us finish with an optimistic quotation from one of the contributors:
"The signs of hope are there...it is essential that we, all together, keep searching for new ways, new means, to keep alive and hand on to others the story of the living Jesus".

The Editorial Team.

“These poor young men, having left their countries to be missionaries, have always kept the notion: “I am a missionary above all”. Consequently, and quite unawares, they do not attach enough importance to religious life and give themselves over too much, I believe, to an external life. Well then! If this conjecture is well founded, it is important to enlighten these confreres by getting them to see that in truth the mission is the goal but religious life is a means sine qua non, a means which must hold al their attention and be the object of all their concern.

If they are holy religious they will save souls, if they are not they will do no good, because God’s blessing is attached to their holiness and their holiness depends solely on fidelity to the practices of religious life.”

(N.D. XIII, 353)

CHRONICLE

A SPIRITAN BISHOP IN AMAZONIA

Dom Mario Clemente

From my first contact with the Spiritans in the State of Minas Gerais in southern Brazil, I heard people talking about Tefé. It was a mission of the Congregation in Brazil. Missionaries came to see us and they talked of the history of that mission. The Spiritans had gone into the states of Minas Gerais and Sao Paulo to train Brazilian missionaries who could eventually serve in Tefé and Cruzeiro do Sul.

Unforeseen Events

When I was working in the south after my ordination, I was invited to go to Tefé for six months to give a missionary a chance to look at the pastoral methods being used in other parts of Brazil. I was asked to visit several parishes to tell them about some of the pastoral experiences of the south. The Bishop, Dom Joachim, was on holiday in Holland at the time of my visit, but he asked me to stay until he returned. I subsequently met him in Manaus and he asked if I would be willing to work with him in Tefé. My reply was that, being a Spiritan, all that was needed was for my Superiors to appoint me to that mission.

When I got back to Minas Gerias, I was immediately transferred to Sao Paulo to help with the formation of the aspirants. But I soon learnt that Dom Joachim had requested that I be appointed Bishop of Tefé and that Rome wanted the Superior General to send me to do some preparatory courses. I replied that I was ready to follow any courses that the Congregation judged to be useful for me, but there was no way in which I would agree to be a Bishop. I felt I had no vocation and no qualifications for such a task. So they left me in peace.

About three months later, I was following a course for formators organised by the conference of religious. During the course, I began to feel guilty, reflecting that a religious, and particularly a Spiritan, should be ready to accept any mission that is proposed to him. I met the Superior of the District of Amazonas, who was following another course nearby, and I asked him what was happening regarding a new bishop for Tefé. He told me that another priest and myself had been chosen as possibilities by the confreres, but the former was considered by many to be too old. So there was a stalemate with no evident solution. As a result, I passed through a real crisis of conscience, and I finally concluded that I could no longer refuse a Spiritan work which I had been asked to do.

The Prelature of Tefe

At the beginning of the century (1910), the newly-created Prefecture of Tefé was confided to the Congregation. The French and Portuguese Spiritans who were already working there took charge. In 1950, it was made into a Prelature so that, although it was very much a mission territory, it did not come under the jurisdiction of the "Propaganda Fidei"; this was in sensitivity to the feelings of the local people, who did not want to be classed as a "mission". Each Prelature was confided to a religious Congregation; this one was the responsibility of the Province of Holland which had quite large numbers available at that time.

When I arrived in Tefé, the clergy were entirely Dutch, including two who were not Spiritans. Subsequently, the Province was not able to replace those who were old, sick, or transferred elsewhere. There were a few seminarians, but they complained that they felt abandoned and in fact no Spiritan considered himself able to take on the task of forming the local clergy. Several unsuccessful attempts had been made in the past.

The State of Affairs

The Spiritans of Tefé *were full of courage and were devoted to their task*. They worked tirelessly for the poorest of people, targeting particularly education, forming communities, and support for the Indian cause. But only some young lay missionaries succeeded in living permanently in Indian villages.

The parishes here are immense, but with a relatively small and dispersed population. It is considered good if the priest can visit a station once a year, so his work has little in common with the conventional parish priest. He tries, above all, to encourage these people who are so isolated. He tries, where possible, to get the communities to arrange some sort of celebration on Sundays, to help each other, to insist on their rights etc.

The Prelature *was largely dependent on help from outside*, especially for finance and personnel. All the key ministerial posts, all the direction and decision-making were in the hands of outsiders, with minimal lay participation.

Our Missionary Plans

I was a Spiritan bishop in a missionary Church, with a foreign clergy (including myself, because I come from a distant region of Brazil) who were visibly ageing. My pastoral experience was from the south centre of the country, where the lay people are strongly encouraged to play their part in the running of the Church. So I proposed that we should try to do something similar in our diocese. We had a two-fold aim: on the one hand, a greater participation of the Amazonian people and transfer of decision-making, and on the other, to progress in the inculturation of the Church. Our thinking was as follows: *"We are missionaries, so our work is to help this Church to grow and do ourselves out of a job"*. We often used this phrase to describe our efforts: *"....so that they can walk on their own feet"*

Four principles and pastoral objectives were established in the first pastoral meetings:

- To base our pastoral approach on *community*, i.e. form and encourage the people so that as many as possible, even the most simple, can find a role.
- Create *pastoral councils* at all levels - the Prelature, the parishes and the communities.
- To set up *various ministries* so that a greater number can play a part in the pastoral, liturgical and administrative life of the Church.

- Bring about *a greater financial participation* of the local people, so that all can have a greater feeling of belonging and of being appreciated.

This greater participation of the laity in a more ministerial Church should create an atmosphere conducive to the emergence of vocations and the formation of a local clergy.

Different Reactions

By the grace of God, this approach began to bear fruit almost at once. But other difficulties soon arose because of the decreasing number of Spiritans and changes of personnel. In appealing to the Congregation, I came up against different reactions:

- For some (including *the young Brazilian Spiritans*), Tefé was the business of older men and had nothing to do with the young of the province.

- Others (*the Provinces* in general) recognised the quality and importance of the work but simply did not have men available. There were a few exceptions.

- *The General Administration* confirmed that it was a truly Spiritan mission and that it was fitting that some first appointments be made to it from various provinces. This support from the General Council for Tefé stimulated some provinces to help us.

Team-Building cannot be taken for Granted

We accepted the challenge that the Spiritans of the district would have to make a special effort to welcome and be open to the newcomers and we realised that this would not always be easy. For example, we would have to get to grips with community life, which would almost certainly be demanded by the new arrivals. Perhaps we were lacking in community poverty and too inclined towards excessive pastoral activism. How would we ensure that the young ones would have sufficient finance? (The older confreres relied on the help of friends and relations).

We had a meeting of all the Spiritans and priests of the Prelature to explain our hopes, our difficulties, our worries, and to listen carefully to each other. After a year working together, the young felt they were not being understood properly while the older ones felt that the growing demands of community life, insisted on by the new arrivals, were taking away from the pastoral commitment. However, the difficulties were slowly overcome, thanks to several meetings where these problems were openly discussed.

The Personnel Problem

The aim to establish a local Church remained thwarted because we could not count on a stable clergy. A team would reflect on varied themes, but by the time conclusions were reached, the original members were no longer there. Such discussion is inevitably a slow process in our context because the enormous distances make it impossible to have more than two meetings a year, yet there are many topics that need to be discussed together.

The Relationship with the Congregation

The lack of clarity regarding the commitment of the Congregation to a local Church leads to many difficulties. Perhaps the situation in Tefé is somewhat unique. A very extensive mission was confided to the Spiritans but, for many reasons, it has not been possible to construct a local Church with even a few diocesan priests and resources coming from the participation of the people. So a situation of considerable dependence on the Congregation has persisted to this day. Attempts to collaborate with a sister Church in southern Brazil and with other religious Congregations have come to nothing. Attempts to form a local clergy have constantly come up against difficulties specific to the region: the diminution of personnel from a Province, doubts arising in the post-conciliar period and a model of priesthood that is scarcely adapted to the realities of our region.

A dialogue between the local Church and the Congregation is difficult because it is not easy to define who are the responsible elements. Is the Spiritan bishop, who accepted his nomination as an integral part of a Spiritan mission, now going to have to carry the whole responsibility for the local Church, without priests and without a consistent ecclesial structure, while his Spiritan confreres only take on partial and well-defined tasks?

I must stress that I have never for one moment felt abandoned by the confreres here; it is rather a headache for which they, no more than I, can find a solution.

The Problem of Limited Appointments

The Spiritan, as a missionary, cannot simply be identified with the local Church or the local clergy; he is a missionary, he has a mission, a particular charism which he puts at the disposition of the Church. Much has been said and written to try to define the nature of this vocation, but I would like to point to the deficiency of some of these solutions. Many of them seem to suppose the existence of a mission or a local Church almost without problems or at least capable of managing on its own.

Many Spiritans have a short commitment, enough to learn the language and have an idea of the local customs. But we are acutely aware today of the importance of inculturation and how superficial a brief stay in a country can be. The person who is only staying a short time is in a hurry to complete certain projects and being unwilling to go at the slow pace of the people, he can end up working alone.

I am happy to have been able to share with my Spiritan brothers the efforts we are making and the difficulties we are facing. We sometimes feel very isolated in our immense mission. The problems that I have outlined are certainly connected to the special context of Amazonia. We will continue to carry out our mission with the firm conviction that the Kingdom of God is coming amongst us.

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